

# **Project Description**

## **For the**

### **California Veterans Communication Project**

#### **Purpose**

The State of California (the State), through the lead agency County San Luis Obispo (the County) is seeking proposals to implement a statewide communications plan to improve outreach to veterans.

In doing so, the State desires to significantly impact attainment of the strategic goals, and implementation of best practices, identified in the California Department of Veterans Affairs' (CalVet) report to the Legislature entitled "CalVet and County Veterans Service Officers Strategic Partnership and Best Practices." CalVet and the County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) are positioned to be successful by working together through these best practices.

Specifically, this contract will implement marketing efforts to facilitate the CVSOs ability to connect veterans with needed services and benefits. This project must increase awareness among all veterans of the variety of assistance available to them, and how and where to access those benefits. The communication project will increase the visibility and awareness of the services the CVSOs provide, which will in turn establish them as veteran resources within each community. This project should foster continuous communication with those veterans by integrating with other projects such as CalVet Connect.

#### **Best Practices**

This project seeks to implement the following best practices:

1. Increase public presence and public awareness of veterans while increasing veteran awareness of the benefits and services CVSOs provide. Rebrand and re-message who veterans are and the strengths veterans bring to the community. Debunk myths regarding veterans and the benefits and services that may or may not be available.
  - Ensure that we are asking "Have you served in the military?" instead of "Are you a veteran?"
  - Create Public Service Announcements (PSA) to show in the lobbies of the CVSO and other offices such as mental health, social services, and medical services agencies across all levels of government (federal, state and local).
  - Increase the frequency of press releases regarding veteran benefit information.
  - Develop mass marketing efforts such as movie theater ads, PSAs, bus advertisements, etc.
2. Focus on how to increase awareness of how to locate and connect with their CVSO's benefits and services by veterans and their families from various emerging veteran demographic groups such as women, Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgender, and veterans impacted by federal Don't Ask Don't Tell policies.

## **Partners**

While the County is the lead agency and responsible for day-to-day management of the contract, this statewide communications effort involves a partnership of the following agencies:

- County of San Luis Obispo – Contract Manger
- California Department of Veterans Affairs – State level strategic partner
- California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) – Representing county level strategic partners
- Selected contractor

## **Partner Responsibilities**

### **County of San Luis Obispo**

- Implement a contracting effort to solicit and select a vendor to accomplish the project's goals and objectives.
- Provide for day-to-day contract management of the project.
- Keep CalVet and CACVSO informed on project implementation progress.

### **California Department of Veterans Affairs**

- Provide guidance to the project as the state level strategic partner.
- In conjunction with CACVSO representatives keep the Legislature and other stakeholders apprised of project process.
- Is responsible for completing all state level budgetary and reporting requirements.
- Make available all prior studies, surveys, or studies on veteran issues to the contractor for their review.
- Provide the contractor with copies of previously developed public service announcements (PSA), marketing materials, fact sheets, etc.

### **California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO)**

- Provide guidance to the project as the county level strategic partner.
- Represent the best interests of the other counties not directly involved in the project.
- In conjunction with CalVet representatives keep the Legislature and other stakeholders apprised of project process.

### **Selected contractor**

- Develop and implement a project to accomplish the goals and objectives identified above and that meets all proposal requirements identified below.
- Keep the County, CalVet and CACVSO informed on project implementation progress.
- Assist the partners in preparing for legislative hearings and in the development of any reports to stakeholders including the Department of Finance and Legislature.

## **Proposal Requirements**

Potential contractors shall submit a detailed proposal that demonstrates their expertise in statewide marketing campaigns and identifies specific marketing efforts to foster initial contact with veterans and their families that will in turn facilitate the CVSOs ability to connect veterans with needed services and benefits. The vendor must address how their proposal addresses the implementation of the best practices identified above.

1. Proposals must identify the vendor's prior experience in similar efforts and specifically any efforts involving veteran issues.
2. Proposed marketing efforts must be customized to the unique characteristics of the several media markets in California to include: referral to specific CVSO offices servicing each marketplace; targeting significant populations of non-English language users in each marketplace; and other demographic characteristics that significantly impact the message being presented.
3. The contractor shall take the lead on establishing the primary partnerships in select media markets to include those broadcast and print outlets with significant regional coverage.
4. The proposal must provide for the collection of metrics to demonstrate the effectiveness of individual components of this effort. Metrics shall be gathered and presented separately for each marketplace and aggregated at the state level. The contractor shall propose metrics to be reviewed by the County, CalVet and the CACVSO prior to implementation.
5. The proposal must include a component to allow veterans to quickly be connected to the appropriate CVSO. An example of this could be the implementation of a statewide toll free number that requests the veteran to input their zip code at which time their call will be automatically redirected to a live person in the CVSO office serving that zip code.
6. The proposal must include a major broadcast and print awareness campaign in each marketplace that includes both paid and free use of broadcast time, and print space.
7. Contractor shall work with the lead county, CACVSO and CalVet to develop messaging that resonates among veterans across different ages, ranks, military branches and types of service (combat versus non-combat, etc.). Contractor shall review and incorporate results from prior surveys or focus group research involving veterans and veteran issues when formulating the messaging.
8. The contractor shall review and incorporate (as appropriate) existing media products (such as PSAs, fact sheets etc.) to better leverage the scope of this effort.
9. The contractor shall provide at least monthly status reports on project implementation to the County, CalVet and CACVSO. Reports may be made via conference calls, on-line meetings, etc. at the convenience of the participants.
10. The contractor shall provide a report at the conclusion of the effort to describe actual implementation of the project, strengths and weaknesses of the chosen approach, opportunities for future success and detailed metrics.
11. The contractor shall participate in state budget hearings in approximately May 2014 and be prepared to describe their approach, expected results and any early

successes. This participation may consist of legislative staff meetings or budget hearing testimony.

### **Potential Options for Implementation**

Recognizing that the purpose of seeking proposals is to rely on the professional expertise of the contractor to get the most effective use of limited funding, the following options are offered as potential ways to implement the effort.

1. Establishing media partnerships is a way to garner free or discounted broadcast time (TV or radio) or print space (newspaper) in exchange for the partner having the opportunity to publicly associate with a well-known or “feel good” cause (thus establishing good will in the community and raising their positive image with viewers/readers).
2. Providing each CVSO with a turn-key program to establish secondary-level (non-regional) partnerships with local media outlets including ready-to-air (or print) TV, radio and print advertisements. This effort would include training on how to implement such partnerships.
3. Produce professional media partnership kits for use by the CVSO when they approach their local media for partnership opportunities. Kits might include background on CVSOs, CalVet, and USDVA and some of their services, statistics on the types of challenges faced by veterans and their families (i.e., why the services are needed), specifics of the partnership opportunity, copies of or links to the ads, etc.
4. Provide training for CVSO employees on the effective use of the partnership kits and ads, and to provide general “pitch” training in preparing for their meetings with media outlets.
5. Exploring the placement of Internet ads on targeted websites frequented by veterans. Ads would link to specific CalVet web pages that provide veteran benefit information.
6. Provide the CVSO with downloadable materials—such as a handout or fact sheet—for use on their websites, for e-mails or mailings, and for veterans who visit their offices. These materials would highlight some of the most common benefits veterans are eligible for, and provide information on where and how to either access the benefits or get more information.
7. Implement efforts to generate earned or “free” media presence through promotional efforts other than advertising such as through issuance of a news release that results in a story on the 10 o’clock news, or meeting with members of a newspaper’s editorial board, which subsequently writes a positive editorial, etc. Engaging in earned media activities at the beginning of this effort, to raise general awareness of the issue particularly any surprising statistics showing the under usage of benefits by California veterans, or stories about how these benefits have helped turned lives around.
8. Assist CVSOs with implementing or expanding their individual and collective social networking presence. This might include collection and distribution of existing marketing materials (documents, fact sheets, webcasts, etc.) appropriate for internet placement or, to the extent funds permit, development of new materials.

### **Funding**

The total funding available for this effort is \$400,000 including the County's overhead costs. Overhead charges will be limited to 7% or \$28,000. The contractor may expect \$372,000 to expend on the effort.

### **Vendor Selection**

The County is responsible for solicitation and selection of the vendor. There are several possible avenues for the County to use to meet that responsibility. In the event that the County implements a competitive process for award of the contract the process must:

- Be based upon grading criteria that will includes:
  - The project partners obtaining the best value for the available funds;
  - Evaluation of each vendor's experience in statewide communication projects including veteran projects;
  - Accomplishment of project goals;
  - How the proposal implements the identified best practices.
- Include a review/selection committee that includes representatives from the County, CalVet and CACVSO.